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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD PROMOTES ELECTION FOCUS IN
MEETING WITH KEY IRAQI SUNNI TRIBAL LEADERS

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Summary

11. (C) Ambassador to Iraq Khalilzad outlined recent compromises in the Constitution drafting process and promoted the need to focus on the December elections during a three-hour meeting in Amman with Iraqi Sunni Arab tribal leaders. The meeting included several major Sunni Arab tribal figures, including the brother-in-law of the King of Saudi Arabia and the paramount Sheikh of one of Iraq's largest tribes. Baghdad political figures Iyad Allawi, Adnan al-Janabi, and Izzat Shabinder also attended the meeting. The meeting saw active give and take on issues ranging from federalism and the status of Kirkuk, to the need to maximize Sunni Arab political participation and form a broad-based new government after the December elections. Alleged continued growth in Iranian influence and presence inside Iraq, and alleged pro-Iranian activities of the current government, were also major issues. Ambassador Khalilzad put the latter issue in the context of the need to maximize Sunni political participation. Opposition to the insurgency and terror and support of building a strong Iraq will help defeat Iran's strategy of keeping Iraq weak and dependent. Initial reaction to the meeting was very positive, and many of the Iraqi Sunni attendees asked for future follow-up. In addition to directly promoting U.S. goals and expanding contact links, the meeting appeared to advance the coalition-building efforts of Iyad Allawi. End Summary.

12. (C) U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad met for three hours with a large group of influential Iraqi tribal and political leaders on September 21 at the U.S. Ambassador's residence in Amman. While the group included former Iraq Prime Minister Iyad Allawi (a secular Shia), eighteen of the twenty-one Iraqis present were Arab Sunnis, including leading Sunni tribal figures from Anbar, Mosul, Kirkuk, Tikrit, and the South (see paragraph 18 below for an annotated list of Iraqi attendees).

13. (C) In his opening statement, Ambassador Khalilzad described his mission in Iraq as "working with Iraqis to help Iraq succeed" in becoming a democratic, stable, united, and prosperous country. However, Khalilzad stressed, these goals cannot be achieved unless the various communities in Iraq come to an understanding and agree on certain principles with regard to the future. This in turn requires realism, good will, and willingness to compromise.

Working on the Constitution

14. (C) Khalilzad outlined his intensive efforts since arriving in Iraq in late July to work with the Iraqi Constitution drafters and political leadership, including Sunni Arabs, to help craft a document that promotes achievement of the above goals and be acceptable to the large majority if not all Iraqis. He noted that "a Constitution is not a political party platform," but a living document reflecting the broadest possible consensus on how a people wish to be governed. Such a document cannot be achieved without compromise; no one group can expect to get everything it wants. He observed that the recent Constitutional negotiations were difficult, and compounded by the tendency of most of the current political leadership (excepting ex-PM Allawi and his party) to overlook the cross-cutting interests and aspirations of Iraqis as a whole in favor of narrow ideological or ethnic interests. Nonetheless, Khalilzad noted, several important compromises in the areas of Federalism, the role of Islam, ownership of energy and water resources, and Iraq's place in the Arab world, were achieved during the final weeks of drafting. He outlined each of these compromises in some detail, and noted that discussions on additional "tweaking" of the Constitution are continuing.

Defeating Iran's Strategy

15. (C) In addition to noting that the Constitution is subject to amendment, Khalilzad stressed that decisions on implementation and parameters of many key governance issues, including the precise form and nature of Federalism in Iraq,

have been consciously left for decision by the next National Assembly and government, to be formed after the December 2005 elections. He emphasized that this, plus the probable multi-year longevity of the next government, makes widespread participation in these elections by Sunni Arabs who care about the future of Iraq absolutely essential. Khalilzad described the Sunni Arab boycott of the January 2005 elections as a "huge mistake" that crippled Sunni Arab influence and promoted Iran's strategic and tactical objectives of achieving a weak and dependent Iraq. He forcefully encouraged those present to promote the largest possible participation and voter turnout by their communities in the December election.

16. (C) Allawi followed up on several of Khalilzad's points, arguing that, despite its shortcomings on federalism, religion, and other issues, the Constitution is largely acceptable and should be regarded as a way station to the December elections, which, more than the Constitution itself, will determine Iraq's future. Formation of a forward-looking, nationalistic and democratic coalition after this election will defeat the agenda of Iran and Syria and finally put Iraq on the right track for the future. It will also permit revision through amendment or interpretation of some of the current problematic portions in the Constitution.

Dealing with Federalism

17. (C) Most attendees clearly took on (albeit sullenly in some cases) Khalilzad's and Allawi's key points on the need to look past the Constitution draft and focus on the December election. Several attendees agreed that the January 2005 Sunni election boycott was a mistake. Khalilzad and Allawi's stress on the importance of the December election and the call for massive Sunni Arab participation was not challenged, nor did anyone argue that the Constitution was completely unacceptable. The only Constitutional issue that was actively pursued by attendees was federalism. Abdullah Khorbit, Rafaa Sahab al-Kubaisi, Majid al-Suliman, (all from Anbar) and Gazi al-Hanesh (paramount sheik of the al-Taie), among others, raised several concerns over federalism, and especially its implications for a strong and cohesive Iraq, and as a possible Trojan horse for rising Iranian ambitions.

18. (C) Ambassador Khalilzad responded that "like it or not," the reality is that federalism cannot be avoided in any Iraq that includes Kurdistan. Kurdistan has been effectively separated from Iraq for nearly 15 years, and cannot be peacefully re-integrated with the rest of Iraq outside of a federal structure. The implications of federalism for the rest of Iraq will be decided by the next Iraqi government; options run the gamut from no federal structure outside of Kurdistan to a wide variety of other options. Asked if the US really favors a unified Iraq, Khalilzad reiterated that the U.S. has no position on federalism per se (other than recognizing the realistic need for it in order to re-integrate the Kurds), but is committed to formation of a united, strong, democratic, and prosperous Iraq that cannot be divided or turned into a dependent by neighboring countries, as Lebanon formerly was by Syria.

19. (C) Sheikh Wasfi al-Asi al-Obeidi made a long and sometimes emotional comment on alleged Kurdish leadership efforts to unfairly deprive Arabs and Turkomen of political power in Kirkuk, including allegations that large numbers of Iranian Kurds are entering Iraqi Kurdistan and being lodged, presumably as potential new voters, in Kirkuk. He also recounted several allegations about Kurdish leadership abuses during the January 2005 election, including alleged widespread transportation of Kurdish voters in support of multiple voting inside Kurdistan and the Kirkuk region. He said that Arab and Turkomen voters do not want to be victims of fraudulent elections, and are sure that this "pattern" will continue unless there is comprehensive U.S. and/or UN supervision of the election voting and the final count. He explicitly rejected reliance on Kurdish or Shia-dominated Iraqi security forces in the Kirkuk area as guarantors of voting security.

110. (C) Ambassador Khalilzad recognized al-Obeidi's concerns and assured him the USG firmly supports the residency rights of Kirkuk's Arab citizens; however, Khalilzad warned, all of Kirkuk's residents need to be wary of outside manipulation. Khalilzad seconded the need for voters to have confidence in the "fairness" and legality of the voting process. He suggested working with the Election Commission to ensure that fairness and voting rights are protected.

Ex-Ba'athi Reintegration

111. (C) Several speakers, including Rafaa Sahab al-Kubaisi, Abdul Jabar al-Kubaisi, and Adnan al-Janabi, criticized

continued efforts to deprive ex-Baathis of a political role and to prevent the re-emergence of a "democratic" Ba,athist party that could compete in future elections. The al-Kubaisi,s were the most strident in this regard, Rafaa noting that he "has been authorized" by the Ba,athist party (in exile?) to speak for it in this regard. Ambassador Khalilzad asked how many other attendees agreed that a (non-Saddamist) Ba,athist party should be allowed to re-emerge, but few responded.

¶12. (C) While agreeing that the large majority of Ba,athist party members were not criminals and should be allowed to fully participate in Iraqi society, Khalilzad stated categorically that the USG will not cooperate with those who nostalgically desire to recreate an old-style Ba,athist regime. "The old regime is dead and it is never coming back," he stated. That being said, Khalilzad outlined an idea that he said would be crystallized over coming months to initiate a comprehensive accountability and reconciliation process that will re-integrate most ex-Ba,athis with parallel, active prosecution of Ba,athist criminals. Allawi added that there were three kinds of Ba,athists: criminals ("very few"); honest true believers; and opportunists. The last two categories (though not the Ba,athist party per se) should be fully reintegrated into the Iraqi political system, he opined.

Sunni Arabs: "Iran is Taking Over"

¶13. (C) The large majority of speakers made reference to alleged massive Iranian infiltration into Iraq, and/or control over much of the current Iraqi government. "Baghdad is about to fall again," warned Sheikh Sa,ad Abdullah Kharo al-Nasiri from Tikrit. Sheikh Mutashar al-Saadoun from Nasiriyah and Basra shook with anger as he alleged rampant Iranian migration, intimidation, and takeovers in the south. Some speakers wondered if this indicates a secret U.S. desire to strengthen Iran.

¶14. (C) After several such comments, Khalilzad set the record straight by energetically stating that the U.S. regards Iran as a dictatorship led by liars and extremists, that the U.S. resolutely opposes Iranian and Syrian infiltration and destabilization activities, and that the U.S. will never agree to allowing Iraq to become an Iranian satellite. While agreeing with the Sunni Arab questioners that the Iranians are a "big problem," Khalilzad reminded them that their community must also shares partial responsibility for the growth in Iranian influence. For example, their promotion of the Sunni Arab election boycott brought Iranian allies to power (only 150, 000 additional votes for Sunni parties of Allawi,s coalition would have blocked them), and the cooperation of some in their community with Iran,s surrogate Syria insurgents advanced Iranian goals. While agreeing that the Iranian problem requires attention, Khalilzad reiterated that the most powerful way to repel the Iranian threat is through the ballot box - i.e., by electing a responsible, nationalistic government that will create stability and help Iraq develop its economy. This in turn will eventually win over most of those currently cooperating at some level with Iran, he predicted.

Praising Sheikh Sabah of al-Qaim

¶15. (C) Prior to the conclusion of the meeting, Talal al-Gaaod from Anbar rose to extend special recognition to Sheikh Sabah from al-Qaim, who was recently forced out of al-Qaim after several days of fighting Zargawi forces, due to lack of ammunition. "Sheikh Sabah, alone among us (tribals), has actually done something" al-Gaaod noted to the assembled sheikhs. Sheikh Tariq al-Abdallah (seconded by Allawi) proposed that a group of Sunnis go on a speaking tour to the USA and meet with USG officials to show that "we are not against the goals of the United States." The Iraqi attendees thanked Khalilzad for meeting with them and many asked that the USG contact be strengthened. Ambassador Khalilzad agreed that he meeting had been very helpful and promised to find ways to continue exchanging views with Iraq's tribal leadership, whether in Iraq or Amman.

Comment

¶16. (C) This meeting promoted Sunni outreach and overall U.S. goals in Iraq. It succeeded in moving the focus away from the resentment over the imperfect constitution to the need to work together to promote a large voter turnout in December. The discussion became increasingly animated, and despite emotional moments, the atmosphere was positive throughout. The Iraqis greatly appreciated the meeting and initial feedback from attendees has been positive. Most but not all of the tribal leaders were first rank, and the guests were diverse in background. Most of the attendees were not from Baghdad and have had limited or no contact with senior USG officials over the last two years. As noted by

Ambassador Khalilzad, to following-up this conclave with further sessions is needed to gain greater traction and foothold in the Sunni Arab community.

17. (C) Another apparent "winner" from the meeting was ex-Prime Minister Allawi and his coalition-building policy. Allawi conducted himself with dignity and calm throughout, and was surrounded by Sunni tribals for many minutes after conclusion of the meeting.
End Comment.

18. Iraqi Attendees:

1. Ex-PM Iyad Allawi

2. Dari al-Fassal al-Jarba. Key Shammar leader from Mosul, now living primarily in Amman. Brother-in-law of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

3. Majid al-Suliman from Ramadhi. Paramount Sheik of the Dulaime, his influence has declined. Working closely with Allawi.

4. Sabah Sattam al-Shargi from al-Qaim. Fought bitterly over the summer against Zarqawi and his allies. Pushed out of al-Qaim two weeks ago when his tribe ran out of arms/ammunition. Hopes to form a tribal unit to be trained by US forces.

5. Gazi al-Hanesh. Paramount Sheik of the Al-Taie. From Mosul area.

6. Mutashar al-Saadoun. Sunni tribal leader from South (Basra/Nasirriyah).

7. Talal al-Gaaod, originally from Heet.

8. Abdullah Khorbit from Ramadhi. The young, &political face8 of the Khorbits.

9. Tarik al-Abdullah. Wealthy businessman and tribal leader from near Fallujah. He mainly shuttles between Amman and the Gulf

10. Abdul Jabbar al-Kubaisi. A leading figure in this West Anbar clan.

11. Akram Zankana. Wealthy Kurdish tribal chief and businessman based in Amman. Close to Allawi.

12. Sa,ad Abdullah Khara al-Nasiri. Head of clan in Tikrit. Opposed to Saddam, well connected in Salah)al-din Governorate.

13. Khalid Effan al-Eysawi

14. Daham Hamad al-Alwani

15. Rafaa Sahab al-Kubaisi. Ex member of Ba,athist party from Anbar, willing to cooperate as a "Neo-Baathist" in the political process. Supposedly authorized to speak to the USG for this group. Reportedly very influential in West Anbar.

16. Sa,ad al-Obaidi. Influential in Kirkuk, Mosul, and Salah al-Din.

17. Saa,d al-Jabouri al-Mulla. From Doura area (SE of Baghdad). Shuttles between Iraq and Jordan.

18. Wasfi al-Asi al-Obeidi. Key Sunni Arab tribal figure in Kirkuk.

19. Izzat Shabinder. Iraqi nationalist Sh,ia close to Allawi. Quasi-Islamist.

20. Adnan al-Janabi. National Assembly member and chief of the al-Janabi,s.

21. Ahmed Abdul-Gaffur al-Samarrai. Head of the Sunni Waqf.

HALE